



Winter Squash

Eating vegetables helps to reduce the risk of heart disease, heart attack, stroke, high blood pressure, digestive issues, and obesity, and winter squash is an inexpensive way to get nutrients like vitamins A and C, potassium, and fiber. The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for adults recommend eating 2½ cups of vegetables a day. Try filling half your plate with fruits and non-starchy vegetables before adding protein and carbohydrates to your dish. People with diabetes need to be aware that winter squash does have more carbohydrate than other veggies like broccoli, tossed salad or green beans, so will have more impact on blood sugars. A 1 to 1½ cup serving is suggested.

There are many different varieties of winter squash—pumpkins, butternut squash, acorn squash, and spaghetti squash are some of the most common. Because they are hard with a thick skin, they can be stored in a cool, dry, place for a long time and don't need refrigeration until cut. When in season, look for them in grocery stores and at road side stands. Choose a heavy squash with a firm, dull skin, without any signs of bruising or decay.

Butternut Squash (To cut squash easier, pierce with fork in a few places and microwave a few minutes first)

Basic Preparation: Set oven to 400°F. Cut squash in half length-wise, remove seeds and stringy flesh from center, place squash flesh side down in pan, and add enough water so bottom of pan is covered. Bake until tender, remove from heat, turn over, season with spice combinations like garlic, coriander, cumin and turmeric OR allspice, nutmeg, and ginger.

Nutrition Facts: One cup cubed contains 63 calories, no fat, 16 grams carbs, 1 gram protein, and 3 grams of fiber.

Acorn Squash

Basic Preparation: Set oven to 350°F. Cut squash in half, remove seeds and stringy flesh from center, and place squash in a baking dish. Cover with ½ inch of water. Bake, covered for 30 minutes. Uncover for the last 10 minutes of cooking to brown. Squash should be tender when pricked with a fork. See a recipe for microwave preparation below.

Nutrition Facts: One cup cubed contains 56 calories, no fat, 15 grams carbs, 1 gram protein, and 2 grams fiber.

Spaghetti Squash

Basic Preparation: Set oven to 375°F. Cut squash in half, remove seeds and stringy flesh from center. Brush the insides of each half with oil and place flesh side down on baking dish. Bake for about 40 minutes or until easily pricked with a fork. Run a fork through the cooked squash to get 'spaghetti-like' texture. Serve with tomato sauce and parm cheese if desired.

Nutrition Facts: One cup cubed contains 40 calories, no fat, 10 grams carbs, 1 gram protein, and 2 grams fiber.

Sugar Pumpkin

Basic Preparation: Set oven to 350°F. Cut squash in half, remove seeds and stringy flesh from center. Brush the insides of each half with oil and place flesh side down on baking dish. Bake for about 40 minutes or until easily pricked with a fork. Keep in mind that sugar pumpkins are smaller (often just a 2-3 lbs) than carving pumpkins, and are tastier, too!

Nutrition Facts: One cup cubed contains 30 calories, no fat, 8 grams carbs, 1 gram protein, and 1 gram fiber.

Squash Seeds

All squash seeds can be roasted— simply scoop them out and separate them from the stringy flesh. Then sprinkle them with a teaspoon or two of oil and a pinch of salt and spread them in a single layer on a baking sheet. Bake at 275° F for about 15 minutes. Seeds may make popping noises. Experiment with different spices like curry, cumin, and hot pepper.

Tasty Acorn Squash in the Microwave

2 servings

Adapted from www.cooks.com

1 acorn squash
4 tsp brown sugar

2 tsp butter
Optional : 1 tsp lemon juice, pinch nutmeg, curry, nuts

Directions: Wash squash and pierce in several places with a fork. Cook the whole squash in microwave for 4 minutes, turn over, cook another 4 minutes. Cut squash in half and remove seeds. Fill each center with a tsp of butter and 2 tsp of brown sugar. Place back into microwave for another 3 minutes or until tender. Apply additional toppings if desired.

Nutrition Facts: Calories 160, Fat 4 gm, Sodium 10 mg, Carbohydrate 31 gm, Fiber 3 gm, Protein 2 gm

Did you know that if a recipe calls for one kind of winter squash, you can usually substitute another? Pumpkin, butternut, acorn, delicata, buttercup, and hubbard squash can all be used interchangeably. The flavors might change subtly, but the overall taste will be similar. Spaghetti squash is the most notable exception, because it is stringier in texture than the other types. Some people enjoy substituting spaghetti squash for regular spaghetti in pasta dishes to cut calories and carbs.

Winter squash make a delicious side, whether you add sweet or savory spices. For a sweet dish, puree cooked squash with a scoop of brown sugar and some cinnamon, nutmeg, or ginger. For savory, try garlic, curry, or onions. Try different toppings, too, like nuts or cheeses.

Pumpkin Mac and Cheese

6 servings

Adapted from: chocolatecoveredkatie.com

The pumpkin puree in this mac and cheese recipe makes it thick, filling, and creamy without adding the saturated fat that traditional mac and cheese gets from butter and large amounts of cheese. It also gives it that orange color without the use of artificial food dyes. You can use canned pumpkin, or fresh baked pumpkin or butternut squash. Frozen butternut squash can be substituted for the pumpkin puree. It makes for a great comfort food on a crisp fall day.

1 c pure canned pumpkin puree
½ tsp garlic powder
½ tsp salt
½ c milk (low-fat preferred)

½ tsp ground black pepper
1½ c shredded sharp cheddar cheese
12 oz pasta (elbows or shells; whole wheat preferred)
5 oz plain fat-free Greek yogurt

Directions: Cook pasta according to package instructions. While pasta is cooking, combine all other ingredients in a medium pot, adding yogurt last — after cheese has melted. Stir well and bring to a simmer. Drain pasta and stir into sauce.

Nutrition Facts: *Calories 350, Fat 11 gm, Saturated Fat 6 gm, Sodium 390 mg, Carbs 47 gm, Fiber 3 gm, Protein 18 gm (If using whole wheat pasta, increase fiber to 6 grams). To lower fat and calorie content, use 'light' cheese.*

Butternut Squash Soup

6 servings

Source: UCONN Cooperative Extension

This soup will work well with other kinds of squash too, or with chopped frozen squash. Adjust spices as you prefer.

1 Tbsp of olive oil
2 onions, chopped
2 carrots, chopped
2 garlic cloves, minced
1 c canned tomato puree
5 c low sodium chicken or vegetable broth

1 cooked winter squash, insides scooped out
½ tsp salt
½ tsp ground black pepper
1 ½ Tbsp dried oregano
1 ½ Tbsp dried basil
Optional: thyme, rosemary

Directions: Heat oil in a large pot over medium high heat. Stir in onions, carrots and garlic and cook for about 5 minutes. Stir in tomato puree, broth, squash, and herbs. Bring to a simmer and cook, covered, for about 30 minutes.

Nutrition Facts: *Calories 150, Fat 3 gm, Sodium 150 mg, Carbohydrate 28 gm, Fiber 7 gm, Protein 7 gm*

Roasted Winter Vegetables

Not sure what to do with various root vegetables? Try this simple recipe and serve them as a side with dinner.

2-3 Tbsp olive oil
1 winter squash, peeled and chopped into 1 inch pieces
Root vegetables, chopped into bite sized pieces: beets, carrots, sweet or white potatoes, turnips, kohlrabi, etc.
Pinch of salt and pepper
Optional spices: rosemary, thyme, oregano

Directions: Preheat oven to 425°F. In a large bowl, toss squash and root vegetables with olive oil, salt, pepper, and spices (optional) until all are coated. Spread veggies in a single layer on a baking sheet and put in oven. Check every 20 minutes, stirring or pushing around with a spatula so nothing sticks, until all vegetables are easily pierced with a fork.